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van Hooft, E.A.J.; Born, M.Ph.; Taris, T.W.; van der Flier, H.

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# Ethnic and Gender Differences in Applicants' Decision-Making Processes: An Application of the Theory of Reasoned Action

Edwin A. J. Van Hooft\*  
Free University Amsterdam

Marise Ph. Born  
Erasmus University Rotterdam

Toon W. Taris  
Radboud University Nijmegen

Henk Van der Flier  
Free University Amsterdam

Although a growing proportion of the new entrants into the workforce consist of women and ethnic minorities, relatively little is known about the recruitment and job choice processes of these applicant groups. Therefore, this study investigated cultural and gender differences in job application decision processes among 191 job seekers looking for temporary employment. The theory of reasoned action (TRA) was found to be a valid framework to explain job application decisions, although gender differences existed in the strength of the relations. Job attractiveness and perceived person–organization fit added to the prediction of job application intention over and beyond the TRA variables.

Recruitment is often identified as one of the most critical human resource management (HRM) activities for organizational success (Taylor & Collins, 2000). It is crucial for organizations to be successful in attracting applicants, because organizational attraction influences the effectiveness of subsequent personnel selection (Boudreau & Rynes, 1985). Rynes and Barber (1990) consider targeting “non-traditional” applicant pools (i.e., applicants who differ from typical hires regarding aspects such as gender, ethnicity, or age) as an important organizational strategy to increase attraction success. Although a considerable amount of research has been conducted in the area of applicant attraction and recruitment during the last 25 years (Barber, 1998; Chapman, Uggerslev, Carroll, Piasentin, & Jones, 2005), relatively little is known about targeting several “non-traditional” applicant pools, such as ethnic minorities and women (Highhouse, Stierwalt, Bachiochi, Elder, & Fisher, 1999; Rynes & Barber, 1990). At the same time, a growing proportion of the new entrants into the labor force consist of women and ethnic minorities (Chemers, Oskamp, & Costanzo, 1995; Triandis,

Kurowski, & Gelfand, 1994). In order to recruit effectively in these groups, it is important to gain a better understanding of their job application decision-making processes. A first purpose of the present study was therefore to investigate ethnic and gender differences in the predictors of job application intentions among job seekers in the Netherlands. We investigated these ethnic and gender differences within the framework of Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action (TRA). Although this model has proven its validity in a wide range of studies (e.g., Sutton, 1998), to our knowledge no research has used the TRA to explain job application decisions. Thus, a second purpose of the present study was to examine the validity of the TRA in explaining job application decisions.

Previous research has shown that applicants' job choice decisions are affected by several factors, such as attractiveness of job attributes (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996; Schwab, Rynes, & Aldag, 1987; Turban, Forret, & Hendrickson, 1998), organization reputation (Gatewood, Gowan, & Lautenschlager, 1993; Highhouse, Beadle, Gallo, & Miller, 1998; Turban *et al.*, 1998), and perceptions of person–organization (P–O) fit (Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Judge & Cable, 1997). Furthermore, previous research has studied the effects of

\*Address for correspondence: Edwin A. J. Van Hooft, Institute of Psychology, Erasmus University Rotterdam, P.O. Box 1738, 3000 DR Rotterdam, The Netherlands. E-mail: vanhooft@fsw.eur.nl

variables such as perceived probability of being offered a job (hiring expectancies; e.g., Barber & Roehling, 1993; Highhouse *et al.*, 1998; Rynes & Lawler, 1983), and perceived person–job (P–J) fit (e.g., Cable & Judge, 1996) on job choice decisions, but the results were not very supportive. Little research, however, has examined the combined effects of these variables on job application decisions. As a third purpose, we examined the combined effects of job attractiveness, job reputation, hiring expectancies, P–O and P–J fits on job application decisions, and the extent to which the TRA variables mediate the effects of these variables on job application decisions. The investigation of these variables in concert is important because it makes it possible to determine which variables contribute most to the prediction of job application intention. Furthermore, mediation analyses can be conducted, which may lead to a better understanding of the processes underlying job application decisions. Figure 1 displays the research model that guided our study.

## TRA

This study used Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) TRA to investigate the underlying processes leading to job application decisions. Applied to application decisions, the TRA states that the immediate antecedent of the decision to apply is the intention to apply for a job (*job application intention*). Job application intention in turn, is predicted by the extent to which a person evaluates applying for the job positively or negatively (*job application attitude*), and the perception of social pressure to apply for the job (*subjective norm*). That is, job seekers will be more inclined to pursue a specific job if they have a positive rather than a negative evaluation of applying for that job. Furthermore, they will be more inclined to pursue the job if they experience positive social pressure from significant others to do so. Because the TRA only applies to behaviors that are under the individual's volitional control, Ajzen (1985) proposed the theory of planned behavior (TPB), extending the TRA with the concept of *perceived behavioral control* (i.e., the

perceived difficulty to perform the behavior of interest). As the decision to apply for a job is a volitional process that is under complete control of the individual, the TRA should be a suitable framework for explaining job application decisions.

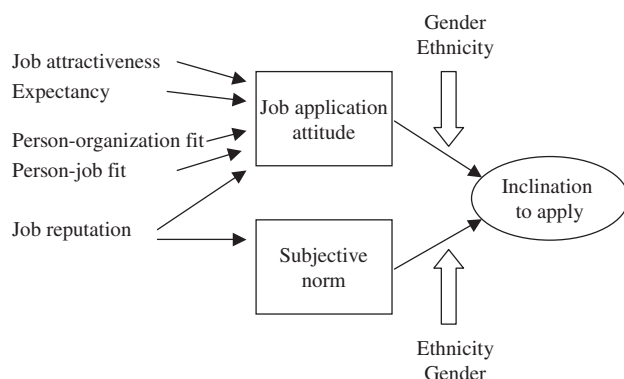
Both the TRA and the TPB have proved their value in predicting a broad range of behaviors, as demonstrated by several meta-analytical reviews (see Sutton, 1998). Although no research has used either of these frameworks to explain job application decisions, some studies have applied the TRA (or the TPB) to related behaviors such as career choice (Giles & Rea, 1999; Strader & Katz, 1990), women's career behavior (Vincent, Peplau, & Hill, 1998), and intention to switch from a full-time job to a part-time job (Van Vianen & Nieuwland, 1985). Most of these studies supported the relations of attitude and subjective norm with intention as predicted by the TRA. Based on the TRA we formulated the first hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 1:** (a) Job application attitude, and (b) subjective norm will be positively related to job application intention.

The TRA is a complete theory of behavior (Fishbein, 1980; see also Conner & Armitage, 1998); other variables are understood as external variables. Fishbein (1980) described two types of effects that external variables can have in the context of the TRA: (a) moderating effects, that is, influencing the relative importance of attitudes and subjective norms in the prediction of intentions, and (b) indirect effects on intentions, mediated by attitudes and subjective norms. In the following sections we first discuss ethnicity and gender as potential *moderators* of the TRA relationships. Second, we present hypotheses testing the extent to which job application attitude and subjective norm *mediate* the effects of several variables that have been suggested to be important predictors of job application decisions by previous research (i.e., job attractiveness, hiring expectancy, job reputation, perceived P–O fit, and perceived P–J fit).

## Ethnic Differences in the Predictors of Application Intentions

Individuals with different ethnic backgrounds are likely to differ in their attitudes, values, and norms, because of their different cultural roots. Individualism vs. collectivism (INDCOL) is one of the prevailing dimensions on which national cultures have been distinguished. Hofstede (1991) described individualism as pertaining to cultures in which the ties between individuals are loose, and people are expected to look after themselves. People in individualistic cultures tend to perceive themselves as autonomous individuals who are independent of the group ("independent self"), and they tend to give priority to personal goals



**Figure 1.** Overview of the research model.

over collective goals. In individualistic cultures behavior is therefore guided more by personal attitudes (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 2000). Collectivism, in contrast, pertains to cultures in which people are integrated in cohesive in-groups that protect them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty (Hofstede, 1991). People in collectivistic cultures tend to perceive themselves as interdependent with their group ("interdependent self"), and they tend to give priority to goals of the in-group over personal goals (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 2000). Behavior in collectivistic cultures is therefore guided more by social norms (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 2000).

Consistent with this rationale, Abrams, Ando, and Hinkle (1998) found that subjective norm was a stronger predictor of turnover intentions in a more collectivistic setting (i.e., a Japanese sample) than in a more individualistic setting (i.e., a British sample). Similarly, Van Hooft, Born, Taris, and Van der Flier (2004) found that personal attitude was a stronger predictor of job search intention in their Dutch majority sample, whereas subjective norm was a stronger predictor of job search intention in their ethnic minority sample. These differences were explained by differences in INDCOL between the Dutch majority and ethnic minorities in the Netherlands. That is, the Dutch culture has been documented as highly individualistic. Hofstede (1980) classified the Netherlands among the five most individualistic countries in his study (with the USA, Australia, Great Britain, and Canada). In the GLOBE project, the Netherlands was one of the countries lowest on in-group collectivism (with Denmark, Sweden, and New Zealand; Gelfand, Bhawuk, Nishii, & Bechtold, 2004).

The major ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands are from Surinamese/Antillean, Indonesian, Turkish, and Moroccan descent, constituting about 15–20% of the population in the Netherlands (Statistics Netherlands, 2001). Indonesian and Surinamese/Antillean immigrants are from the former Dutch colonies. Turkish and Moroccan immigrants came to the Netherlands as "guest workers" in the 1960s and 1970s. On average, ethnic minorities in the Netherlands have lower levels of education, and have a weaker position at the labor market than the Dutch majority (Statistics Netherlands, 2002). Previous research has described the cultures of the ethnic minorities in the Netherlands as highly collectivistic. Morocco and Turkey were among the countries highest on in-group collectivism in the GLOBE project (together with Philippines, Iran, India, and China; Gelfand *et al.*, 2004). Indonesia ranked among the lowest on individualism in Hofstede's (1991) study. Also evidence exists for the collectivistic orientation of the Surinamese immigrants in the Netherlands (Mesquita, 2001). Further, collectivistic values are likely to be transmitted within immigrant families (Phalet & Schönflug, 2001). Based on the theoretical distinctions in behavioral guidance between individualists and collectivists, and the differences in INDCOL between the Dutch

majority and the ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands, we expected:

*Hypothesis 2:* Whereas (a) job application attitude will be a stronger predictor of job application intention among the Dutch majority than among ethnic minorities in the Netherlands, (b) subjective norm will be a stronger predictor of job application intention among ethnic minorities than among the Dutch majority.

## Gender Differences in the Predictors of Application Intentions

Men and women differ in their values, attitudes, and behavior, partly because of existing gender roles and gender stereotypes (Konrad, Ritchie, Lieb, & Corrigan, 2000). Gender role and stereotype research has shown that women more than men are concerned with the welfare of other people (Eagly, 1987), and that interpersonal relationships are more important to women than to men (Konrad *et al.*, 2000; Williams & Best, 1990). Regarding the construal of the self, women's conception of the self has been found to be more relational compared with men's (Garbarino, Gaa, Swank, McPherson, & Gratch, 1995; Kashima *et al.*, 1995). That is, women more than men define their selves in relationship to others (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). When applied to the TRA, this research suggests that perceptions of social pressure (i.e., subjective norm) are more influential in affecting women's than men's behavior. In contrast, men more than women have an assertive and controlling tendency, resulting in a greater independence of others (Eagly, 1987). Furthermore, men are more often described as autonomous, that is, acting independently of others (Williams & Best, 1990). Individualistic tasks and goals are more important for men than for women (Venkatesh, Morris, & Ackerman, 2000). Applied to the TRA, personal attitudes should be more important in predicting behavior among men than among women. Thus, we expect that:

*Hypothesis 3:* Whereas (a) job application attitude will be a stronger predictor of job application intention among men than among women, (b) subjective norm will be a stronger predictor of job application intention among women than among men.

## The Mediating Role of the TRA

A widely studied model of decision making and motivation is Vroom's (1964) expectancy theory. According to this theory, an individual's motivation to apply is predicted by the attractiveness or valence of the job (*job attractiveness*) and individuals' beliefs that they would be successful in obtaining the job (*hiring expectancy*; Barber, 1998; Schwab

*et al.*, 1987). Consistent with the TRA as described by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975; see also Fishbein, 1980) job attractiveness and hiring expectancy are thought to influence the inclination to apply indirectly via job application attitude. Based on these theories we expect that:

*Hypothesis 4:* Job application attitude completely mediates the positive relationship of (a) job attractiveness, and (b) hiring expectancy with job application intention.

Several studies examined the extent to which an organization's reputation or the image of the organization is related to applicant attraction and applicant decision making (e.g., Gatewood *et al.*, 1993; Highhouse *et al.*, 1998; Turban *et al.*, 1998). These studies consistently found positive effects of organizational reputation on applicant attraction and applicant decision making. These effects have been explained by signaling theory (Barber, 1998; Rynes, 1991), stating that job seekers have limited information about the attributes of the job and the organization in early stages of the decision making process. In this stage applicant decisions are therefore likely to be heavily based on general impressions, such as the organization's reputation. These general impressions are interpreted as signals concerning other, unknown organizational attributes (Rynes, 1991). Similarly, the general impression of a specific job (*job reputation*) can be interpreted as a signal for other attributes of that job, and is therefore expected to influence the applicant's inclination to pursue the job.

In the context of the TRA we expected that the effect of job reputation on job application intention is mediated by both job application attitude and subjective norm. That is, the more positive the general image of the job is, the more likely it is that a job seeker will regard it sensible and wise to pursue the job, resulting in a more positive application intention. In addition, a positive general image will affect significantly other's perceptions of the job, and therefore the applicant's perceived social pressure to apply. Thus, we expected:

*Hypothesis 5:* The positive relationship of job reputation and job application intention is completely mediated by (a) job application attitude and (b) subjective norm.

Another important concept in the applicant choice literature is P-O fit. Based on theoretical models like Schneider's (1987) attraction-selection-attrition framework, it is suggested that individuals seek jobs that match their needs, values, and personality. Consistent with this notion, several studies reported a positive relationship between perceived P-O fit and job application decisions (Cable & Judge, 1996; Judge & Bretz, 1992; Judge & Cable, 1997). Also on the level of the job, perceptions of fit may affect applicants' decisions. That is, Cable and Judge

(1996) found a positive correlation between perceived P-J fit and job choice intentions, indicating that individuals are more inclined to apply for jobs that match their personal skills and abilities.

In the current study we expected perceptions of P-O fit and P-J fit to relate positively to the individual's inclination to apply. These relations were expected to be mediated by job application attitude. That is, the more individuals perceive their needs, values, personality, skills, and abilities to match the organization and the job as described in a vacancy text, the more positive their attitude will be regarding applying for the job. This more positive attitude will result in a greater inclination to apply for the job.

*Hypothesis 6:* Job application attitude completely mediates the positive relationship of (a) perceived P-O fit and (b) perceived P-J fit with job application intention.

In summary, this study examined the predictors of job seekers' inclination to apply, using the theory of reasoned action. The TRA variables job application attitude and subjective norm were hypothesized to predict the inclination to apply. Ethnicity and gender were expected to moderate the effects of attitude and subjective norm. The TRA variables were hypothesized to mediate the effects of other variables on inclination to apply (see Figure 1).

Whereas most recruitment studies used samples of (graduating) students (Chapman *et al.*, 2005), we selected a mainly lower educated non-college sample of job seekers who were looking for a temporary job. We chose this sample for two reasons. First, it allowed us to investigate whether previous findings on the effects of job attractiveness, hiring expectancy, P-O fit, P-J fit, and job reputation would generalize to lower educated job seekers looking for temporary employment. This is important because previous research has generally found that lower educated job seekers differ in their job search attitudes from higher educated job seekers (Schmit, Amel, & Ryan, 1993). Also, evidence exists that temporary employees' work-related attitudes differ from those of permanent employees (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004). Because the work force increasingly consists of temporary workers (e.g., Berchem, 2002; Feldman, Doeringhaus, & Turnley, 1994), and most theory and frameworks in the area of work and employment are grounded in the dominant paradigm of "standard" (i.e., fulltime and permanent) employee relations (Connelly & Gallagher, 2004), it is important to test the generalizability of our models to "non-standard" employees, such as temporary workers. Second, the proportion of ethnic minorities is substantially larger among temporary workers than in the total work force (Van der Ende, Donker van Heel, Koene, & Nauta, 2002), which would likely produce a more equally distributed sample of ethnic minority and Dutch majority participants, resulting in more power to examine ethnic differences in the predictors of job application decisions.



## Method

### Participants and Procedure

The participants were recruited at an Amsterdam office of a large Dutch employment agency. Walk-ins were asked whether they were looking for a job, and if so, whether they were willing to participate in a study about job seeking by filling in a short questionnaire. It was emphasized that their cooperation in the study was voluntary and confidential, and would not impact their employment relationship with the temporary employment agency.

In total 201 job seekers completed the questionnaire. Over half of these (57.7%) considered themselves as belonging to one or more ethnic minority groups.<sup>1</sup> Specifically, 37 participants characterized themselves as Surinamese, 9 as Antillean, 7 as Turkish, 32 as Moroccan, and 38 as Other. Respondents who ticked the "Other" option could fill in their country of origin. The country/region of origin of these last 38 participants varied between North America ( $n = 1$ ), Central or South America ( $n = 3$ ), Northwestern Europe ( $n = 6$ ), Southern Europe ( $n = 3$ ), Africa ( $n = 8$ ), Middle East ( $n = 5$ ), Indonesia ( $n = 4$ ), rest of Asia ( $n = 5$ ), and missing ( $n = 3$ ). As we focused on ethnic minorities in this study, the non-Dutch participants from Northwestern European or North American countries were excluded from the analyses. In addition, participants who choose the "Other" option but failed to indicate their county of origin were excluded. The final sample included 191 participants, with 45.0% belonging to the Dutch majority and 55.0% belonging to an ethnic minority group.<sup>2</sup> About half of the participants (51.8%) were male, and age ranged between 16 and 65, averaging 23.80 ( $SD = 6.38$ ). Level of education varied between primary school/lower vocational training (36.6%), secondary school/high school/intermediate vocational training (41.1%), and college/university (19.9%). The majority of the participants were not employed (69.9%).

The first part of the questionnaire included questions on demographics and the type of job that people were looking for. The second part presented a vacancy text for a catering job. Participants were informed that it was a fictitious vacancy text and were instructed to read the vacancy text carefully before proceeding to the next page. For purposes of external validity, the fictitious job ad was designed to resemble a typical job ad of the temporary employment agency. The job ad included information on the job title ("Catering employee"), type of industry ("Hotel and catering"), location ("Amsterdam"), task description ("Preparing and distribute lunch, and keeping the location clean"),<sup>3</sup> job requirements ("No specific educational requirements") and contact information. The last part of the questionnaire included items measuring the participants' responses to the vacancy text. After the completion of the questionnaire, participants were directed to an employee of the employment agency.

## Measures

The questionnaire was designed to tap eight constructs: job application intention, job application attitude, subjective norm, job attractiveness, hiring expectancy, job reputation, perceived P-O fit, and perceived P-J fit. Unless indicated otherwise, response options for the items of these constructs ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. All measures were based on instruments that have been shown to be reliable and valid in previous research. Furthermore, confirmatory factor analysis corroborated the discriminant validity of our measures. Specifically, an eight-factor model with all items loading on the construct that they were supposed to reflect showed satisfactory fit,  $\chi^2$  (349,  $N = 175$ ) = 587.04,  $p < .001$ ,  $RMSEA = .06$ ,  $SRMR = .05$ ,  $NNFI = .93$ ,  $CFI = .94$ . All factor loadings were significant, and modification indices for cross-loadings were small. Moreover, the eight-factor model fitted the data significantly better than a one-factor solution with all items loading on a single factor,  $\chi^2$  (377,  $N = 175$ ) = 2963.27,  $p < .001$ ,  $RMSEA = .20$ ,  $SRMR = .16$ ,  $NNFI = .57$ ,  $CFI = .60$ ,  $\chi^2_{\text{difference}}$  (28,  $N = 175$ ) = 2376.23,  $p < .001$ . Cronbach  $\alpha$  reliabilities were sufficiently high for all measures (see Table 1).

**TRA Variables.** People's inclination to apply for the job as described in the vacancy text (*job application intention*) was assessed with five items selected and adapted from previous research (Aiman-Smith, Bauer, & Cable, 2001; Giles & Rea, 1999; Turban & Keon, 1993). Sample items are: "I would try to get this job," "I would prefer other jobs over this job" (reverse coded), and "Would you apply for this job?" Response options ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* for the first two items, and from 1 = *no, definitely not* to 5 = *yes, definitely* for the last item. *Job application attitude* was measured with three items, asking the respondents to indicate the extent to which they would regard it sensible, wise, and useful to apply for this job (cf. Vinokur & Caplan, 1987). *Subjective norm* was assessed with a two-item scale, asking the respondents to indicate the extent to which their significant other, respectively, most people who are important to them would think they should apply for this job (cf. Giles & Rea, 1999; Strader & Katz, 1990; Vinokur & Caplan, 1987).

**Job Attractiveness.** Three items measured the subjective attractiveness of the job. Items were selected and adapted from previous research (Aiman-Smith *et al.*, 2001; Turban *et al.*, 1998). The items were: "I find this job very attractive," "I would like to work in this job," and "I have a positive view of this job."

**Hiring Expectancy.** The individual's beliefs that he or she would be successful in obtaining the job were measured with three general items (based on the expectancy items used by Van Hooft, Born, Taris, Van der Flier, & Blonk, 2004): "I think that I would be able to get this job, if I applied for it," "Chances are high that they would offer me the job, if I applied," and "I am convinced

Table 1. Means, standard deviations, and correlations among all variables

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1 Gender (0 = male, 1 = female)	0.48	0.50										
2 Ethnicity (0 = Dutch majority, 1 = ethnic minority)	0.55	0.50	-.08									
3 Job application intention	2.76	1.02	-.10	.40**	(.89)							
4 Job application attitude	2.90	1.28	-.07	.33**	.85**	(.94)						
5 Subjective norm	3.03	1.07	-.10	.39**	.71**	.66**	(.74)					
6 Job attractiveness	2.82	1.11	-.15*	.36**	.85**	.81**	.66**	(.92)				
7 Hiring expectancy	3.74	0.91	.01	-.16*	.07	.10	-.02	.04	(.89)			
8 Job reputation	2.96	0.79	-.11	.41**	.53**	.45**	.65**	.54**	-.02	(.86)		
9 Perceived person–job fit	3.99	0.76	-.03	-.05	.15*	.16*	.17*	.17*	.44**	.18*	(.90)	
10 Perceived person–organization fit	3.27	0.92	.00	.38**	.55**	.47**	.52**	.54**	.26**	.59**	.44**	(.87)

Notes: Owing to incidental missing values  $N$  varies between 182 and 191. Alpha reliabilities are in brackets on the diagonal.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ .

that the organization would appoint me in this job, if I applied."

**Job Reputation.** Five items were developed to assess the individual's perception of the general reputation of the job under consideration. These items were based on Highhouse *et al.*'s (1998) company image scale and Turban *et al.*'s (1998) applicant perceptions of organization reputation scale. Sample items read: "Employees are probably proud to say that they work in this job," "Jobs like this have a good reputation among people I know," and "I think that many people I know will have a positive view of this job."

**Perceived P–O Fit.** Subjective P–O fit was measured with three items. Consistent with Cable and Judge (1996) and Judge and Cable (1997) respondents were asked whether they thought that their personalities would match the personalities of the job incumbents, they would fit in this organization, and their personal values would match the organization's values.

**Perceived P–J Fit.** Based on Cable and Judge (1996) respondents were asked whether they thought they possessed the knowledge and abilities to perform this job. A third item was added, reading: "I am confident that I would be able to perform this job" (cf. Giles & Rea, 1999). Two more items were developed for this study, that is: "As far as I can see, I think that I am able to perform well in this job," and "I am sure I can do this job."

**Demographics.** Gender was coded 0 = male and 1 = female. Ethnicity was measured using the subjective method. That is, respondents were asked: "To which ethnic group(s) do you consider yourself to belong to?" Response options included *Dutch*, *Surinamese*, *Antillean*, *Turkish*, *Moroccan*, and *Other*. Respondents could tick one or more options. Ethnicity was then coded as 0 = *Dutch majority* (that is, respondents who indicated they considered themselves Dutch only) and 1 = *ethnic minority* (i.e., respondents who considered themselves as belonging to one or more ethnic minority groups).

## Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations among the study variables. Moderated multiple regression analysis was used to test the validity of the theory of reasoned action in the context of job application decisions (Hypothesis 1), and the moderating effects of ethnicity (Hypothesis 2) and gender (Hypothesis 3). To avoid multicollinearity, the variables used in the regression analysis were centered first. In the first step (see Table 2) job application intention was regressed on gender, ethnicity, and the TRA variables job application attitude and subjective norm. Both TRA variables were positively related to job application intention (Hypothesis 1 supported).

**Table 2. Moderated multiple regression analysis of job application intention assessing differences depending on gender and ethnicity**

	Job application intention ( $\beta$ )		
	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3
Step 1: Demographics and TRA-variables			
Gender (0 = <i>male</i> , 1 = <i>female</i> )	-.04	-.04	-.05
Ethnicity (0 = <i>Dutch majority</i> , 1 = <i>ethnic minority</i> )	.06	.05	.05
Job application attitude	.67**	.66**	.66**
Subjective norm	.25**	.25**	.25**
Step 2: Two-way interactions			
Gender $\times$ Job application attitude		-.11*	-.12*
Gender $\times$ Subjective norm		.15**	.15**
Ethnicity $\times$ Job application attitude		.00	.00
Ethnicity $\times$ Subjective norm		-.03	-.03
Step 3: Three-way interactions			
Gender $\times$ Ethnicity $\times$ Job application attitude			.03
Gender $\times$ Ethnicity $\times$ Subjective norm			.00
Multiple <i>R</i>	.88**	.88**	.88**
$\Delta R^2$	.61**	.01*	.00
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.76**	.77**	.77**

Notes: Owing to incidental missing values  $N = 184$ .

\* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ . TRA, theory of reasoned action.

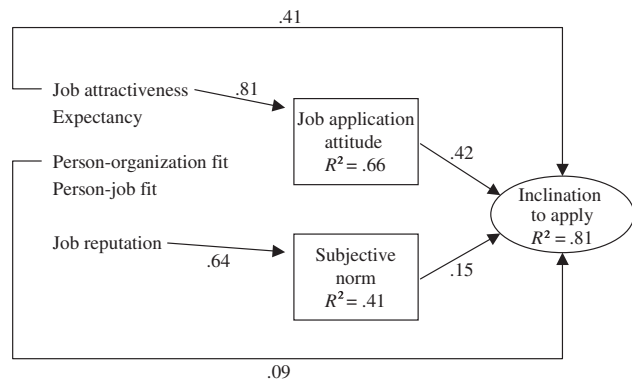
The interaction terms of gender and ethnicity with both TRA variables were added in the second step. The Ethnicity  $\times$  Job application attitude and the Ethnicity  $\times$  Subjective norm interaction were not significant (Hypothesis 2 not supported). Both the Gender  $\times$  Job application attitude and the Gender  $\times$  Subjective norm interaction were significant. As is indicated by the sign of the beta-weights, attitude was a stronger predictor of intention among males than among females, whereas the opposite was true for subjective norm (Hypothesis 3 supported). In the third step the two three-way interactions (i.e., Gender  $\times$  Ethnicity  $\times$  Job application attitude and Gender  $\times$  Ethnicity  $\times$  Subjective norm) were added to the equation. Neither of them was significant.

Structural equation modeling with LISREL 8.30 (Jöreskog & Sörbom, 1993) was used to test the mediating role of the TRA variables job application attitude and subjective norm in the relation of job attractiveness, hiring expectancy, job reputation, perceived P-O fit, and perceived P-J fit with job application intention (Hypotheses 4–6). The covariance matrix was analyzed using maximum likelihood estimation. We first estimated the model as depicted in Figure 1, suggesting that the TRA variables completely mediate the effects of the other variables. This model showed relatively poor fit,  $\chi^2 (10, N = 179) = 103.09$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $SRMR = .11$ ,  $GFI = .87$ ,  $CFI = .87$ , with only the job attractiveness – attitude, job reputation – subjective

norm, attitude – intention, and subjective norm – intention paths being significant. Second, we estimated a partial mediation model, that is, the model as depicted in Figure 1 with added direct paths between job attractiveness, hiring expectancy, P-O fit, P-J fit, job reputation and intention. This model fitted the data significantly better than the complete mediation model,  $\chi^2 (5, N = 179) = 57.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $SRMR = .10$ ,  $GFI = .93$ ,  $CFI = .93$ ,  $\chi^2_{\text{difference}} (5, N = 179) = 45.95$ ,  $p < .001$ . However, several of the direct paths were not significant (i.e., the paths of hiring expectancy, P-J fit, and job reputation to intention). We therefore re-estimated the partial mediation model without the non-significant direct paths,  $\chi^2 (8, N = 179) = 58.72$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $SRMR = .10$ ,  $GFI = .92$ ,  $CFI = .93$ . Because the increase in  $\chi^2$  was not significant,  $\chi^2_{\text{difference}} (3, N = 179) = 1.58$ ,  $p > .10$ , the latter model was preferred for reasons of parsimony. Finally, we also removed the non-significant paths of expectancy, P-O fit, P-J fit, and job reputation with job application attitude,  $\chi^2 (6, N = 179) = 55.23$ ,  $p < .001$ ,  $SRMR = .14$ ,  $GFI = .91$ ,  $CFI = .94$ . Again, this last model did not fit the data significantly better,  $\chi^2_{\text{difference}} (2, N = 179) = 3.49$ ,  $p > .10$ , but was preferred based on the criterion of parsimony. Figure 2 presents the standardized path coefficients of this final model.

Hypothesis 4 stated that job application attitude would completely mediate the positive relationship of (a) job





**Figure 2. Standardized path coefficients of the final partial mediation model.**

attractiveness and (b) hiring expectancy with job application intention. As Table 1 shows, job attractiveness was positively related to job application intention. However, in contrast to the hypothesized complete mediation (Hypothesis 4a), job application attitude only partly mediated the relation of job attractiveness with intention. That is, as displayed in Figure 2, job attractiveness both indirectly (via job application attitude) and directly related to job application intention. Hiring expectancy was not significantly related to either job application attitude or intention (Hypothesis 4b not supported).

Hypothesis 5 stated that job application attitude and subjective norm would completely mediate the positive relationship of job reputation with job application intention. As Table 1 shows, job reputation was positively related to job application intention ( $r = .53, p < .01$ ). Figure 2 demonstrates that this relationship was completely mediated by subjective norm (Hypothesis 5 supported). That is, the job reputation – subjective norm and subjective norm – job application intention paths were positive and significant. The direct path between job reputation and job application intention, however, was not significant (and therefore not included in the final model as displayed in Figure 2).

Hypothesis 6 stated that job application attitude would completely mediate the positive relationship of (a) perceived P–O fit and (b) perceived P–J fit with job application intention. As shown in Table 1, P–O fit and P–J fit were both positively related to intention ( $r = .55, p < .01$ , and  $r = .15, p < .05$ , respectively). In contrast to the hypothesis, Figure 2 shows that neither P–O fit nor P–J fit explained unique variance in job application attitude. P–O fit did have a significant direct relationship with job application intention though.

## Discussion

A growing proportion of the new entrants into the labor force consist of women and ethnic minorities. Relatively little, however, is known about targeting these specific applicant groups (Highhouse *et al.*, 1999; Rynes & Barber,

1990) and their decision processes leading to job choice. In the current study, we therefore investigated the moderating role of gender and ethnicity in the underlying processes leading to application decisions, using the theory of reasoned action. In contrast to many previous studies in this area, we used a sample of actual, mostly non-college, job seekers who were looking for temporary employment.

### Cultural Differences in Job Application Decisions

The results did not support the expected differences between ethnic minorities in the Netherlands and the Dutch majority in TRA relationships. Job application attitude and subjective norm related to job application intention in a similar fashion in both groups. The hypotheses relating to these expected cultural differences were based on the assumption that ethnic minorities in the Netherlands have a more collectivistic value orientation compared with the Dutch majority. Although consistent evidence exists that the original cultures of the ethnic minority groups in the Netherlands are more collectivistic than the Dutch majority culture (Gelfand *et al.*, 2004; Hofstede, 1980), and that collectivistic values are likely to be transmitted within immigrant families in the Netherlands (Phalet & Schönplflug, 2001), a possible explanation for the lack of support is that due to acculturation processes the ethnic minorities in our sample might have adopted individualistic values with regard to work-related processes. Future research should therefore examine the impact of INDCOL on the TRA relations in work-related contexts, using direct measures of individualism/collectivism.

### Gender Differences in Job Application Decisions

When examining the predictors of job application decisions using Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) TRA, we found some interesting gender differences. As hypothesized, the job seekers' personal attitude was stronger related to intention among men than among women, and perceptions of social pressure were stronger related to intention among women than among men. This finding is consistent with previous research describing women as more relational than men (Garbarino *et al.*, 1995; Kashima *et al.*, 1995; Konrad *et al.*, 2000), and men as more autonomous and independent than women (Eagly, 1987; Williams & Best, 1990). The gender differences that we found were not affected by ethnicity. That is, in both the Dutch majority group and the ethnic minority group the prediction of inclination to apply by attitude and subjective norm was moderated by gender in the same manner.

### Sufficiency of the TRA

The current study examined the validity and sufficiency of the TRA in the context of job application decisions. The TRA was found to be a valid framework to predict job

application decisions of job seekers looking for temporary employment, in that both attitude and subjective norm were significantly related to job seekers' inclination to apply. In combination, these variables accounted for 76% of the variance in application intentions.

In addition to the TRA variables, we examined the effects of several other variables that have been found to be important in previous job choice and recruitment studies (i.e., job attractiveness, hiring expectancy, job reputation, perceived P-O fit, and perceived P-J fit). Whereas job attractiveness, job reputation, and perceived P-O fit demonstrated significant direct or indirect relations with job application intention, hiring expectancy and perceived P-J fit failed to explain unique variance in the TRA variables. With regard to the relation between hiring expectancy and inclination to apply, previous research has not been very supportive either. Although Highhouse *et al.* (1998) found a small positive correlation between perceived difficulty to get the job and job-pursuit intentions, Barber and Roehling (1993) reported that expectations about the probability of hire were not important to the job pursue decisions. With respect to perceptions of P-J fit, we found significantly positive but small correlations of P-J fit with job application attitude and job application intention. However, in combination with the other variables in the model, the relations of P-J fit were no longer significant. This result might have been caused by a ceiling effect, in that the majority of participants may have felt that they possessed the knowledge and abilities to perform this relatively low-skilled job. The limited predictive value of P-J fit has also been demonstrated by other research. Cable and Judge (1996) for example, concluded that job seekers focus much more on fit with the organization than on fit with the job when making job choice decisions.

Because the TRA is held to be a complete theory of behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975), the influence of other variables on job application decisions was hypothesized to be indirect, in that the TRA variables job application attitude and subjective norm were expected to completely mediate their effects. Although this assertion was supported regarding the effects of job reputation, the TRA variables were found to mediate the effects of job attractiveness only partially. Furthermore, P-O fit had a significant direct relation with job application intention. Thus, although the TRA accounted for a large proportion of variance in job application decisions, we found some evidence that job application attitude and subjective norm were not sufficient predictors (cf. Conner & Armitage, 1998; Eagly & Chaiken, 1993).

### *Limitations and Implications*

In this study we investigated the underlying mechanisms leading to job application decisions. A first limitation of the current study, which may limit the generalizability of our

findings, concerned the use of a fictitious job advertisement. However, the fact that the participants in our study were real job seekers who visited a temporary employment agency, and the fact that our vacancy texts resembled real vacancy texts used by the temporary employment agency very closely, may attenuate this concern. Furthermore, by using a fictitious job, we were able to collect data over a longer time period in order to create a sufficient sample size, allowing comparisons between different groups.

Secondly, although we assessed applicant reactions of actual job seekers in a realistic field setting, the study was limited in that reactions were examined regarding one particular job (i.e., hotel and catering job) in one particular setting (i.e., a visit of a temporary employment agency) only. The results therefore may not apply to other jobs and other settings. Future research should investigate the extent to which cultural and gender differences exist in other job-search settings and for other types of jobs.

A third limitation relates to the cross-sectional design, using self-report measures. Common method variance could therefore have inflated the relations among the variables. Although we found a number of strong correlations, other correlations were low or non-significant. Moreover, confirmatory factor analysis demonstrated support for the discriminant validity of the measures used. A related limitation is the lack of a behavioral measure. Our ultimate dependent variable considered participants' *inclination* to apply instead of their real job-pursuit behavior, job choice, or job acceptance. Because we used a fictitious vacancy text, we were unable to trace applicants' real job application behavior. However, previous research reported consistent evidence for a strong positive relation between intentions and subsequent behavior (Sutton, 1998). Further, the recruitment literature shows that applicants' intentions are strongly related to subsequent job choice decisions (Cable & Judge, 1996; Powell & Goulet, 1996). Nevertheless, future research should further investigate (cultural and gender differences in) the predictors of actual job choice decisions.

Our results indicate that job application decision processes may vary depending on applicant characteristics such as gender. For example, women were found to be more sensitive to the opinions of significant others. As such, organizations wanting to target women could focus more on the opinions of these others. In this context, the reputation of the job and organization may be of particular importance. Future research should further investigate group differences in job application decision making processes, focusing on other groups (e.g., higher vs. lower educated job seekers, employed vs. unemployed job seekers, or job seekers looking for temporary vs. permanent employment), as well as on other predictors (e.g., P-O fit, P-J fit, or hiring expectancy). For example, is P-O fit a stronger predictor of job choice among women than among men, or do higher educated individuals focus more on P-J fit than lower educated individuals?

In summary, this study contributes to our understanding of cultural and gender differences in the processes leading to applicants' job choice decisions. Future research should further investigate the subsequence of beliefs, attitudes, intentions, and behavior leading to final job acceptance employing a longitudinal design. As demonstrated by the current study, Fishbein and Ajzen's (1975) theory of reasoned action is a valid and useful framework for studying applicant decision making processes.

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## Notes

1. Respondents were asked to which group(s) they considered themselves to belong to (i.e., Dutch, Surinamese, Antillean, Turkish, Moroccan, or Other), and could tick more than one option.
2. As was described in the introduction, evidence exists that the cultures of the major ethnic minority groups in The Netherlands are more collectivistic than the Dutch culture. As indicated by country rankings on INDCOL, also central/south American, southern European, African, Middle-East, and Asian countries have (much) higher scores on collectivism than The Netherlands (Gelfand *et al.*, 2004; Hofstede, 1980). Therefore, we decided to take all ethnic minorities together and compare them with the Dutch majority group.
3. The task description was either formulated as "working in a team" or "working independently". Participants were alternately given a questionnaire containing one of these task descriptions, in order to assess the effect of work structure on application intentions. However, no effects of work structure on application intentions were found. That is, neither the main effects were significant,  $F(1, 182) = .01, p = .94$ , nor the interaction effects with ethnicity,  $F(1, 182) = .08, p = .77$ , and gender,  $F(1, 182) = .17, p = .68$ . Moreover, Box's test of equality of covariance matrices indicated that the covariance matrices of the two conditions did not differ, Box's  $M = 113.19, F(91, 93, 574) = 1.15, p = .16$ . We therefore decided to collapse the data of the two groups and performed our analyses on the total sample.

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